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12-23-2005

### UM student uses teamwork to make a difference for kids

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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Dec. 23, 2005

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### **UM STUDENT USES TEAMWORK TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR KIDS**

#### **MISSOULA--**

University of Montana senior Chris Orwig had a pretty hectic schedule in 2005. Orwig majors in organizational communications at the University, has started with the Grizzly football team the past two years and lettered for four years. He works as a fly fishing guide. But when you talk with Chris Orwig, you won't hear much about all of this. What he is most interested in talking about these days is the Griz for Kids program.

Orwig grew up in **Fairway, Kansas**. While attending Shawnee Mission East High School, he was involved in a program that served underprivileged children in the **Kansas City** area – the Tennis Project.

“We spent one afternoon each week going to Kansas City to teach tennis to kids who wanted to learn, but didn't have the resources,” he said. “And that experience stayed with me. It inspired me to get something else going to help kids.”

That something else became Griz for Kids, a program to collect toys for nonprofits to distribute to children in the Missoula community and surrounding areas.

“I thought, ‘How many other opportunities do you have to get more than 20,000 people together in one place on a Saturday afternoon in Missoula than a Griz football game?’” Orwig

-more-



said. "My plan was to collect toys during at least one Griz game this season."

Orwig knew last February that he had most of the pieces of the puzzle to make this program a reality – he just had to get them together in a way that would make his plan work.

He approached UM head football coach Bobby Hauck and the UM Intercollegiate Athletics program directors, who said they thought the program was a great idea. Then he got a boost from Associate Professor Greg Larson of UM's Department of Communication Studies.

"I explained my idea to Professor Larson, who hosts a class called Cooperative Education Experience," said Orwig. "The class offers credit to students who do internships. The professor said that all I needed to do was follow the parameters of the class to continue with Griz for Kids for credit."

So, by the beginning of March, Orwig had hatched a plan to make his idea work. Now all he needed, he said, was a media connection. That's where Sheila Callahan, general manager of Missoula's KMSO-FM radio station, came into the picture.

"I met Sheila through a random call to a local nonprofit one day when I was trying to figure out how to proceed with my plan for Griz for Kids," Orwig said. "They put me in touch with her because she was instrumental in the Mountain of Giving program at the station."

The radio station's Mountain of Giving program is one of Missoula's largest holiday toy drives.

"Sheila was the major media consultant for Griz for Kids," Orwig said. "She had the resources to help me get the word out."



The 2005 collection event for the Griz for Kids program was scheduled for the UM-Portland State game in October. The event was publicized through television and radio ads and the Missoulian. People were asked to bring toys to the game to donate them at various campus collection points.

"We had a huge game that day," Orwig said. "I was in the locker room when someone said there was a woman outside who really wanted to talk to me before the game. I went out, and there was Sheila Callahan with a big grin on her face. 'You're never going to believe this,'" she said.

The news that Callahan shared with Orwig that morning was that at only one collection point – at the south end of the Van Buren footbridge – they had unloaded a 70-gallon trash can full of donated toys at least 10 times – and it was only 11 a.m. The game didn't start until 1 p.m.

"That news and the fact that we beat Portland State that day were major highs for me," Orwig said.

The Griz for Kids program collected an estimated \$20,000 worth of toys to distribute and \$3,000 in cash donations this year. Families who applied through area nonprofits use vouchers to shop for the toys at a "store" set up in a Missoula location, Orwig said. That way, he said, kids get something they want, and they won't be left out during the holidays.

Orwig will be moving on when he graduates in May. But he currently is drafting a plan that he hopes will ensure that the Griz for Kids program continues at UM.

"The groundwork is there," he said. "The hard work is done."



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Orwig has recruited fellow Grizzly football players Ryan Wells and Mike Murphy, both juniors at UM, to work with Griz for Kids in 2006.

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Local, Kansas City Star